

(Please read in your congregation and put in your newsletter)

“Indeed, the body does not consist of one member but of many. If the foot would say, ‘Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear would say, ‘Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body,’ that would not make it any less a part of the body....Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.” 1 Corinthians 12: 14-16, 27

June 29, 2009

Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

In fifty days the ELCA Churchwide Assembly will begin. Presiding Bishop Mark Hanson has called the church to 50 days of prayer preceding the Assembly, and I invite you as well. During these fifty days there will be a lot of preparation for the Assembly. Worship will be planned, resolutions will be fine-tuned, guest speakers will be confirmed, meetings will take place. But what happens in Minneapolis is not all we are as a church.

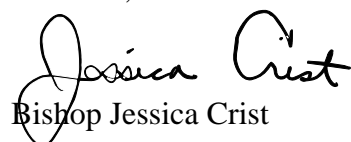
In the next fifty days, the work of the church goes on. Weekly worship will take place in congregations large and small, rural and urban. Food banks will provide food for the hungry. Nursing homes will care for the elderly. In the next fifty days, new missionaries such as Josh and Susie Magyar will have their initial training and orientation. Outdoor ministries and camps will proclaim the Gospel to campers young and old. Campus pastors will prepare for the opening of school in the fall. In the next fifty days, Vacation Bible Schools will stretch congregations and young people to find new ways to hear and tell the old, old story. “Jesus, Justice and Jazz” will engage tens of thousands of teenagers in a church that is bigger than all of us. In the next fifty days, Lutheran Disaster Relief will respond to crises, Lutheran Social Services will create forever families. In the next fifty days we will be the Church in many places, and in many ways.

Paul’s image of the church as the Body of Christ is meaningful for us, especially as he reminds us how much we need each other. I ask you, in the next fifty days, and beyond, to pray for the whole church, to seek wisdom for the whole church, and to seek the unity of the whole church. I ask you to listen to one another, especially those with whom you disagree, and not to jump to conclusions about what the Church may or may not do in Minneapolis in August.

At the end of our Synod Assembly, when two pastors who had been on opposite sides of the sexuality debates read a joint resolution of mutual trust and harmony, it was a powerful moment, and the assembly concurred. I shared that moment with other ELCA Bishops, and one used it as a “snapshot of new creation,” in his closing sermon at their Synod Assembly.

Friends, let us work together on being that new creation, by God’s grace, proclaiming the Good News to all creation. “Now you are the body of Christ, and individually members of it.” You are in my prayers.

In Christ,


Bishop Jessica Crist